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SUBJECT: THE AMAZIGH (BERBERS), PART IV: WESTERN ANTI-ATLAS

REF: A. RABAT 00540  
[1](#)B. RABAT 00567  
[1](#)C. RABAT 00615

Classified By: A/Political Counselor Cynthia Kierscht, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: From March 10-17, Poloff and PAO were on a combined outreach and reporting trip in the anti-Atlas, south of the Atlas mountains on the edge of the Sahara Desert. This cable is the fourth in a series. The population of the western section of the anti-Atlas is larger, and, the associations appeared to be better organized than those to the east. Like the other associations, however, these are concerned about the lack of water, economic development and opportunities for the population. There was genuine concern expressed, especially in the Agdaz area, about the education of girls. Views on being an Amazigh and what that means varied from place to place. End Summary.

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Suq Al-Had Area  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) Driving west from Al-Nif into the anti-Atlas area of the Souss-Massa region, the village housing style gradually changes to multi-storeyed mudbrick constructions, creating impressive vistas. In remote areas such as Tazarine, roads are mud lanes with adjacent open water canal systems. Women wash clothes by pounding them in the canals. Doors of the houses open directly onto the mud lanes. There is a gradual increase in the amount of water. As a result, the area is more verdant and agricultural activities are still possible; however, the people with whom Missionoffs met again pointed to a lack of water (reftels). The Suq Al-Had (Arabic, "wehad" -- the market on the "first day" or Sunday) area has a total population of approximately 5,000.

[1](#)3. (SBU) The Al-Manar Association, directed by Abdelsalam Majdi, an apparently wealthy pharmacist, has worked with GTZ, the German development organization, JICA, the Japanese development organization, as well as with the GOM to provide new wells for people. In part, the old system was refurbished. JICA, according to Majdi, learned that it is now necessary to drill at least fifty meters before reaching clean water. French nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have also worked with the Al-Manar Association.

[1](#)4. (C) Missionoffs visited Majdi's house for lunch, where the president of the commune and twenty other men gathered.

The commune consists of twenty-six villages; the president has an assistant in each village. Conversation during the lunch focused on the problems in the area: economic development, cultural and women's issues. The tax base for the commune is insufficient to provide necessary infrastructure development, according to the president.

15. (C) At the request of Missionoffs, the women who had prepared the traditional Moroccan lunch (Note: Traditional Amazigh food was not served. End Note.) joined the group. There were fifteen women, most of whom appeared to be fifty or older. Only two of the women were literate. The women were dressed traditionally: colorful skirts with over blouses and loosely tied head scarves. Some of the women wore heavy, traditional silver toggle pin jewelry. The toggles are pinned almost at the shoulder, have large broaches on each side and are connected by a large-linked silver chain. These antique toggle adornments are passed from mother to daughter. Only three of the women had these toggles. One of the women told Poloff that other women had had to sell their jewelry when money was needed, or, that some of the women were not from wealthy enough families. She assured Poloff that her jewelry was going to her daughter when she died. When asked whether or not she was bothered about not being able to read and write, the woman said not really as she listened to the radio and saw television, and, she talked to people. She did admit, though, that it might have been "nice" to have learned when she was younger. (Note: Not all of the women spoke Arabic and none of them spoke French; whereas, the men were tri-lingual, including Amazigh, and, some also spoke English. End Note.)

16. (C) Visits to other associations in the area indicated diverse views on the development situation and about women. In Taakilt, after seeing the association's office, Missionoffs were shunted off to the women's section of the Taakilt Association president's house. (Comment: This action was rather odd as the Missionoffs had come to discuss the association with the members, who were all men. The women did not completely accept the gender differentiation. Initially, the association president said he would stay and tell Missionoffs what the women wanted to say. His offer was declined, which seemed to please the women. The women were engaging and Missionoffs extended their stay with them beyond the original time allotted by the association president. End Comment.) The group of ten women expressed deep regret that they no longer had a literacy program in the village, and, some implied that the men did not care. In Suq Al-Thulata (the third day or Tuesday market), there is a vibrant association with many women's and men's programs. This association seemed proud of its women's programs and was pleased to show Missionoffs the handicrafts the women make. There was little or no gender differentiation during the meeting, except that respect was shown for the older members of the association.

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Agdaz  
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17. (SBU) Agdaz, a town south of Ouarzazate is the regional center for the western anti-Atlas and the central town for forty-eight Amazigh associations. These associations coordinate under the umbrella of UDRAD (the Da'ra Development Union in Agdaz). (Note: Da'ra is a major wadi, once filled with water and now dry. It is referred to as the "ghost river." End Note.) The Agdaz area is a mixture of rugged mountain terrain and flat desert. Water, while more abundant than to the east, remains an issue for this area as well (reftels). The associations each have their own priorities, but, as Missionoffs were told, the general foci are economic development, children and women's issues, and water. The associations represent a population of approximately 300,000. The associations have worked with USAID, the Belgian government, the Near East Foundation (NEF) and UNICEF. UDRAD views Zagora, a city to the south, as the central city and the authority with which it must negotiate.

¶8. (C) In Taliouine, the association showed Missionoffs an impressive, restored "kasbah" (dwelling). The restoration of the kasbah was part of a tourism development project funded by USAID. The association members were pleased, and, eagerly discussed the opportunities for the village once visitors come to the area. The Ait Saadane Association in the village of the same name is well-organized. It has received money from numerous sources including the GOM over the nine years of its existence. The delivery of a new water system and girls education are the two projects of which the association is the most proud. During lunch in the village, a discussion about the importance of Amazigh culture, history and language took place. There was disagreement about the role of Amazighs in Morocco: some of the group felt that everything Amazigh should be restricted to the home while others did not, and, all agreed that emphasis should be placed on music and dance within the home.

¶9. (SBU) The most remote association visited was the one in the village of Aynas (Amazigh for Monday). With a population of approximately 600, Aynas appears to be a village struggling to continue to exist. The president of the association, while proud of his village, stated bluntly that there was no real reason for young people to stay there. The association takes education seriously and is improving it for both boys and girls; however, women older than eighteen are not literate. The association has handicraft programs for the women, but is now lacking teachers. Once the area was visited frequently because of the number of saints tombs, but, according to the villagers, there are few visitors now.

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Comment  
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¶10. (C) The western area of the anti-Atlas, while still having water problems, does not appear to be in as difficult a situation as the eastern area of the anti-Atlas. Towns and villages, however, are remote and often accessible only on dried mud one-lane roads. Even in the most remote places, however, Missionoffs encountered well-educated men, sometimes fluent in English, who are committed to making their town or village prosper. UDRAD and the individual associations projected a sense of hope about their area and activities. The UDRAD council knows that it must make difficult decisions sometimes about funding; however, it was quick to point out that if an association did not receive assistance one year, that it would in the future. The council expressed a sense of fair play and clearly it feels responsible for the area.

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Riley